

**Statement of Mary Jo Wills
Ambassador-Designate to Mauritius and Seychelles
Before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee
November 19, 2009**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before this Committee today as President Obama's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Mauritius and the Republic of Seychelles. I am grateful for the confidence and trust that the President and Secretary Clinton have placed in me. I also want to thank Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Johnnie Carson for his strong support.

Democracy and trade continue to be important elements of our bilateral relations with the Republic of Mauritius. Mauritius stands out among African nations for its political stability, its commitment to democracy, its ethnic tolerance, and its strong economic performance over the past four decades. The country has gone through a remarkable economic transformation from a mono-crop economy based on sugar production to a diversified economy resting on export-oriented manufacturing, tourism, and the financial and business services sectors. In recent years, hospitality and property development, information and communication technology, seafood and marine industry, and the biomedical industry have emerged, attracting

substantial investment from both local and foreign investors. In September 2006, the U.S. and Mauritius signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, whose main objective is to strengthen and expand trade and investment relations between the two countries. In August 2009, U.S. and Mauritius announced the launch of formal negotiations for a Bilateral Investment Treaty, which will provide a legal framework that will further encourage investment flows between our two nations.

The U.S. should continue to encourage the Government of Mauritius to engage more deeply in the region and to take on stronger leadership roles. For example, in the arena of UN peacekeeping missions, Mauritius, which operates without a military, is in the unique position to have specially-trained, multi-cultural and multi-lingual police officers who could be an immense asset in supporting peacekeeping operations around the world. Additionally, Mauritius' legal system could, with some modifications, potentially provide much-needed assistance in the prosecution of piracy in the Indian Ocean. These issues provide opportunities for Mauritius to not only model positive behavior, but provide much needed leadership, and I will advocate strongly for Mauritius to move forward on these and other matters.

As a career diplomat and economic officer, I bring over 30 years of experience to the task of promoting democracy and economic prosperity for the benefit of the United States and its

partners around the world. If confirmed, I will encourage them to more strongly embrace leadership roles that will promote democracy and build economic prosperity in the region.

The United States Government enjoys a positive bilateral relationship with the Government of Seychelles. In July of 2009, the Government of Seychelles signed a Status of Forces Agreement with the United States and since then has been extremely cooperative in working with our military to counter piracy and to advance security in the Indian Ocean. The timely approval of implementing agreements of the Status of Forces Agreement allowed an unmanned aerial vehicle pilot program for our military to move forward at a record pace. These activities, along with the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa civic assistance programs, and an increasing number of port calls by U.S. Navy ships, have bolstered our ties with the Seychellois people and government. As Seychelles has faced increasing pirate attacks, putting additional pressure on its limited maritime surveillance capacity, our presence is an important deterrent and potential source of information in the fight against piracy, terrorism, drug trafficking and illegal fishing.

On the economic side, Seychelles was until recently the country with the highest per capita income in Africa. Unfortunately, the global financial crisis revealed the need for

the Seychelles to embark on the path towards much needed economic reforms. With the help of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the Seychelles has made rapid progress on restoring macroeconomic stability, the result of the liberalization of the foreign exchange regime and prudent fiscal and monetary policies. Program implementation has been exemplary, even in the face of strong head winds from the global recession. Strong ownership and broad public support for the reforms have been the keys to the program's success. Inflation has been near zero since March and the exchange rate has appreciated steadily from lows early in the year. Official external reserves continue to recover from near depleted levels. The economy is responding well to the reforms and the contraction in economic activity will be somewhat less than previously forecast, with real GDP now expected to decline by 7.5 percent in 2009. The economic recovery is expected to strengthen, with economic growth rising to 4 percent in 2010.

The Government of Seychelles has also begun reforms in other areas. For example, the government recently commissioned an independent assessment of the government-controlled media to seek ways to better address freedom of the press. If confirmed, I will encourage Seychelles to continue with its IMF-proposed reform program, to continue to improve its human rights standing and to transition to a strong, fully-functioning democracy. I

will also continue to work to sustain the will of the government and people of Seychelles to support U.S. strategic interests in the region, particularly with regard to cooperation in countering transnational threats such as piracy, terrorism, illegal fishing, and trafficking in persons and drugs.

If confirmed my highest priority will be the protection of Americans living and traveling in Mauritius and Seychelles. If confirmed I will serve as an energetic advocate for the promotion of U.S. business and will endeavor to be a careful steward of U.S. resources in Mauritius and Seychelles.

I believe that my extensive experience in senior positions in the Foreign Service at home and abroad -- which have focused on the promotion of democracy and human rights, economic development, and the rights and empowerment of women -- has prepared me well to serve as a U.S. Ambassador.

I am deeply honored to be considered for the post of Ambassador to Mauritius and Seychelles. If confirmed by the Senate, I will work closely with you and other members of the Committee. I welcome your questions.